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## **Sen. Van Woerkom introduces legislation to aid children through the judicial process**

**LANSING** – Children would get help navigating Michigan’s circuit court system under legislation introduced today by state Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores.

Senate Bill 379 would create the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Act to allow a circuit court to establish a court-appointed special advocate program. Under the bill, a court-appointed special advocate would be a volunteer who is appointed by the circuit court to assist in advocating for a child.

“Going through the courts can be a very difficult experience for many children,” Van Woerkom said. “The intervention of a CASA volunteer can make a remarkable difference in the life of a child by making sure their interests are being met.”

Under current law, courts may already appoint CASA volunteers. Senate Bill 379 would establish this practice into law and provide set criteria and guidelines for those volunteers. A prospective CASA volunteer would have to be at least 21 years of age and have a demonstrated interest in children and their welfare. They also must receive instruction in recognizing child abuse and neglect, cultural awareness, child development and court procedures.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. This year’s theme is “Safe Children and Healthy Families are a Shared Responsibility,” celebrating everything that can be done to transform communities into places that care about – and actively support – families and children.

“CASA volunteers symbolize this year’s child abuse prevention theme,” Van Woerkom said. “We all share a responsibility for protecting children, and I hope my bill will draw attention to the CASA program and encourage new volunteers to get involved.”

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